

But if the lay readers of *Piers Plowman* relished this roasting and basting of their ecclesiastical neighbours, turning the page they were to find their own thatch not out of danger from the same fiery indignation. For the richer bourgeoisie, we learn, are developing habits of horrible luxury—they have private parlours where they dine nowadays, instead of in open hall as their fathers did, to escape being bothered by beggars; and parlours, too, with chimneys! (One is reminded of the seventeenth-century Cameron of Lochiel, having to pass a night out in the snow with his sons and furiously kicking away the snow-pillow which one of the young men, in his degenerate effeminacy, had not blushed to roll for himself—so relative a thing is luxury'.) And then, picking their teeth after dinner, these children of Dives have the presumptuous audacity to debate theological difficulties—"why did God allow snakes in Paradise, to entrap Eve and Adam?—and why should we suffer for their doings, any way?":

Thus thei dryvele at her deyse (thek dais) • the
deite to knowe,
And gnawen God with the gorge • whan her gutte is
fulle.

It is indeed easier to denounce them than to answer their questions. And then, we gather, they contract mercenary marriages, made, not in Heaven, but by Mammon; and lead cat-and-dog lives ever after:

And though thei don hem (betake themselves) to
Donmowe *
butifthe develhelp,

To folwen after the flicche • fecche thei it neuere.

Lawyers in particular are odious to the poet. They have indeed never been regarded as the saviours of society; only society has never been able to save itself from them. It is easier, he growls, to measure the mist on Malvern Hills than get 'a momme of here mouthe' (a word of their mouths), till they have seen your money. It seems indeed